

The Best Way to Go

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At the very end Naruto is able to give Sasuke one final gift.

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Author 's Notes: This little one shot was inspired by a few IMs we shared between me and 'Mistress Winowyl.' Thank you for always giving me inspiration. (The humility though I could do without.)

Somehow as the two of them lay there slowly dying it seemed oddly fitting, almost predestined, as though any other ending would have been unacceptable. For more than 20 years they had been enemies, and for most of that time they had been acknowledged as the two most powerful living ninja. They were much alike and completely different. One was a terrorist wanted in almost every land and trusted by no one, not even by people who used his services. He had the reputation of a man who would betray anyone or anything so long as it furthered his own goals. He had no friends, no family, and no close associates; he lived only for himself and for his dreams of vengeance.

The other was the beloved leader of his village and its greatest hero. He was the man who had brought about the current age of peace by uniting all the ninja villages into a common front, thereby making war a thing of the past. He had long since married his one true love and together they'd had five beautiful children, all of whom he loved and treasured. His life was filled with family and a vast network of friends. Even many of his foreign opponents admitted to not only respecting but liking him.

One was sworn to destroy the village of Konoha, the other sworn to defend it. For twenty years they had fought one another. Now at last it was over. At the Valley of the End, where they'd had their first battle, they'd met one final time and fought. The result was that they were lying mortally wounded not five feet from each other, completely exhausted of chakra and bodies so smashed neither could so much as stand any more. The Rokudaime Hokage Uzumaki Naruto and the great Uchiha Sasuke, the last of his clan.

"Hey teme," Naruto called out. "Before we both die there's something I've always wanted to ask you."

"What is it dobe?"

Naruto gave him the big childlike grin he'd always had. "You still a virgin?"

"What?!"

"I was just wondering if you ever unbent enough to actually get laid. Lord knows it might have improved your disposition."

"Baka! Of course I've had sex!"

"Oh that's right; I forgot you were with Orochimaru all those years. Not much chance of you still being a virgin." Despite the hole in his stomach and the taste of blood in his mouth Naruto laughed and laughed. "Though I was wondering if you had any with a *girl*. "

Well... there was that one time when Karin drugged me, I suppose that would count. Sasuke scowled at him. "All these years and you're still the same idiot you always were. We're dying and all you can do is make stupid jokes. You've even got the same empty headed grin you did back at the academy. Is this how you want to spend your last few minutes?"

"Sure," Naruto told him as his laughter died down. "What better way is there to go then with a laugh?"

"Aren't you thinking about all the things you regret?" Sasuke demanded. "Isn't it hard for you knowing this is it? That your life is at its end and you still haven't accomplished your goals?"

Naruto calmly shook his head. "I fulfilled every dream I ever had. I became Hokage and was acknowledge by everyone in the village. I married Hinata and I got to have the loving family I always dreamed about as an orphan. I protected my village and ensured the Leaf

would survive. I'm sad that I won't ever see Hinata or my kids or the village again, but I have no regrets. Dying is easy when you have no regrets."

Sasuke looked at him, his face as serious as it had always been. "Well I wouldn't know about that, my life is nothing but one endless series of regrets." He sighed. "For me dying is hard, a lot harder than I thought it would be."

"That's because you never let yourself be happy, you were always miserable thinking about everything you'd lost, everything you didn't have. If you just would have spent some of your time thinking about all the things you *did* have, all the good things maybe it would have been different. I really think if you could have just laughed a little you could have been happy."

"That was never a choice for me dobe, I forgot how to laugh a long time ago."

Naruto could feel the cold creeping into his chest and knew his time was almost up. "Hey teme there's one last thing I want to tell you."

"What is it dobe?"

"That last day in the academy, when we got assigned to our squads? Remember?"

"What about it?"

Naruto managed a last smile and a little wink. "I never told you this, but you're a great kisser, Sasuke-kun." He chortled.

"Idiot," Sasuke retorted. Then despite himself he laughed as well.

As the darkness closed around him he decided that maybe Naruto was right and this was the best way to go. Not just laughing, but with your best friend at your side to help you through.